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ABSTRACT

This resource guide is intended to help in planning special education program evaluations. It focuses on: basic evaluation concepts, identification of special education decision makers and their information needs, specific evaluation questions, procedures for gathering relevant information, and evaluation of the evaluation process itself. Preliminary information discusses the nature of evaluation, the people involved, and ways to maximize the utilization of evaluation results. Then, the following eight steps to planning a local evaluation are detailed: (1) getting started; (2) describing the program; (3) writing evaluation questions; (4) planning collection of information; (5) planning analysis of evaluation data; (6) planning the evaluation report; (7) managing the evaluation; and (8) meta evaluation. Four appendices provide a meta evaluation checklist, a list of 8 references on evaluation utilization, a list of 11 specific strategies to enhance evaluation utilization, and 15 worksheets keyed to the 8 planning steps. (DB)

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Special Education Program Evaluation

An Overview

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May 1988

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Special Education Program Evaluation
A Planning Guide

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Preface and Acknowledgements

This overview of evaluation originally was prepared for use in two evaluation seminars sponsored by the Council of Administrators of Special Education (CASE): Chandler, Arizona January 27-29, 1988 and Tampa, Florida, February 17-19, 1988. Feedback from those two field tests was used to make the revisions reflected in this document. The document is essentially a summary of "Guidelines for the Evaluation of Virginia's Local Special Education Programs" developed by the authors for the Virginia Department of Education. Partial support for both the Virginia document and this overview was provided by the Mid-South Regional Resource Center (MSRRC) at the University of Kentucky and appreciation is expressed to that center for its contribution. Special thanks go to Ken Olsen of the MSRRC for his comments and recommendations on earlier drafts.

Many other publications were used in the preparation of this document. For a more in depth review it is recommended that the user consult the following:

Brinkerhoff, R.O., Brethower, D.U., Hluchyj, T., and Nowakowski, J.R. Program Evaluation: A Practitioner's Guide for Trainers and Educators. Boston: Kluwer Knijhoff, 1983.

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INTRODUCTION

Purpose

The purpose of this overview is to familiarize the reader with the basic principles and practices of program evaluation. The document primarily is intended for use as a resource or reference tool during a workshop on program evaluation. It is not expected that a reader will be able to simply read the document and conduct an evaluation. The focus of the document is on planning an evaluation. The overall goals are to enable the reader to:

- understand evaluation concepts and what makes evaluations useful;
- identify people who are going to make judgments about the special education program and their information needs;
- determine evaluation questions which focus the evaluation on particular aspects of the program;
- plan for gathering information to enable judgments to be made about the program; and
- evaluate the worth of the evaluation.

What is Evaluation?

Evaluation is a process through which evaluators gather information for decision makers. Therefore, the answer to the question "Why evaluate a program?" is clear. Evaluations are conducted because someone wants to know about the program.

Generally evaluations are conducted to meet the needs of people who are going to be making judgments and/or decisions about the program. These people may be internal or external to the program. Often evaluations of programs are required by legislation as in the case of special education programs. Both state and federal legislation and attendant regulations call for the evaluation of special education programs. Required or not, the aims of evaluation are program improvement and sharing of success. Evaluation is a tool for advocacy. Through evaluation we ensure that appropriate programs are available to exceptional learners, their families, and those who serve them.

Evaluation as a practice has been changing. In the beginning it was a goal oriented experimental enterprise. Now the

expectations for useful evaluation include more formative aspects with an emphasis on changing programs based on feedback from the evaluation.

Additionally the role and function of the evaluator have been modified. We used to think of the evaluator as being separate from the decision process. They were technicians who had the research expertise necessary to design information gathering systems, appropriate research designs and data analysis procedures. Program staff told the evaluator what information was needed and then the evaluator established the procedures required to obtain the information. The result was turned over to the client who would make the decision.

New perspectives on evaluation call for the evaluator to be part of the decision team. In this sense the evaluation becomes a support system to the program. Evaluations and clients engage in an educative process to enable the evaluation to be productive. The client educates the evaluator about the purpose of evaluation, information needs and the context within which the evaluation will be conducted. The client makes the evaluator aware of political and programmatic constraints to the evaluation. On the other hand, the evaluator informs the client about valid, reliable and objective approaches to information collection. Evaluators assist the client in the interpretation of evaluation information. They make the client aware of the potential uses and misuses of the data.

An important by-product of this new view of evaluation is the realization that the information generated from the evaluation is not the sole determinant of the decision made by the client. Program staff combine this information with existing information from other sources including their perceptions of the real world; the political, social, economic and administrative factors associated with the program context.

There are four facets to most evaluation efforts. The first is the statement of evaluation questions which guide the development of the evaluation plan. The questions signal the information that is needed by the decision maker. The next facet is information gathering. Once the questions are identified, the evaluation team designs and implements strategies to gather data to enable the questions to be answered. Data gathering processes may be formal or informal.

The third facet of evaluation is the judgment. When data are gathered, they are put in a form that will allow people to interpret them in relation to some decision. Generally this interpretation is a comparative process that entails the comparison of the information to some standard. A standard

is an explicit or implicit statement of expectation or requirement. Standards come from many sources including: legislation, regulations, guidelines, court decisions, literature, and professional experience. Each person who is making a judgment about a program has some standard in mind. Often there are multiple judges in an evaluation and, at times, multiple standards which may be implicit or explicit.[1]

The final facet of the evaluation is the decision. Evaluations should lead to a decision about the program under consideration. People make decisions based on the outcome of the judgment process. The comparison between the data gathered (what is) and the standard (what should be) can lead to two possible conclusions:

* the program looks like it should; or,
* the program does not meet expectations.

Given this information, five decisions may be made about the program:

* continue the program until it meets the standard (we believe that our standard is viable or the standard is required; i.e. regulation)

* keep the standard, but revise the program (try new materials, strategies, or train staff)

* revise the standard (after looking at program implementation, we may believe the standard is unreasonable or unrealistic given the contextual factors of the program)

* terminate the program (the discrepancy between what the program is and what we want it to be is so large that revisions would be too costly)

* disseminate the program (if the program consistently meets the objectives or standards, it may be time to share it with others who are attempting to accomplish the same things).

In summary:

Evaluation questions can be generated relative to program inputs, processes and/or outputs;

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[1] A useful reference for identifying indicators of success in special education is: National RRC Panel on Effectiveness Indicators for Special Education. Effectiveness Indicators for Special Education. A Reference Tool. Council of Administrators of Special Education, Indiana University, Bloomington, Indiana, 1986.

Information is collected to estimate actual performance and to determine unintended effects;

Judgments are made about discrepancies between what should be and what is; and

Decisions are made on the basis of the information.

This overview should help the reader plan an evaluation that incorporates all four facets.

People Involved in Evaluation.

Evaluation is a people process. As can be seen from the above discussion, people ask questions about the program, gather data on the program, make judgments concerning the program, and, finally, make decisions about the program. Who are these people?

Basically there are three groups of people involved in the evaluation process. First, there are the :.hpl.decision makers. These could be program administrators or the people who control the allocation of resources to the program. For special education this group might include: school district administrators, school board members, state department staff, representatives of funding agencies, and/or state and federal legislators.

Other decision makers include program staff who make the day-to-day decisions about the program. These persons take the resources allocated to the program and put them together to form a meaningful program. They make decisions about how to design and implement the program so that it meets the intents of the administrators and the needs of the client.

The second group of people to be accounted for in an evaluation are the program influencers. This group includes those people who influence the administrators regarding the allocation of resources and influence the staff who are responsible for employing the resources in an appropriate way. For the local special education program these influencers might be students, parents, advocates, local advisory groups, community members, or politicians.

The final group to be involved in the evaluation are the evaluators. These people are usually trained in the principles and practices of program evaluation. The evaluators should have a variety of skills including: program design, measurement, data analysis, report presentation, and group dynamics.

This last skill is perhaps the most important. Evaluation is a team sport. All the groups mentioned above should be involved in the evaluation. The roles played by the various actors should be determined on their skill and knowledge based on the needs of the evaluation process. There should be shared leadership and problem solving in an environment of mutual trust. All may be involved in any phase of the evaluation; including generation of evaluation needs and questions, data gathering, standards setting, formulation of evaluation reports, and, finally, determining how to use the results of the evaluation.

The remainder of this paper will focus on key aspects of the evaluation process. The basic components of an evaluation plan will be discussed. The steps to conducting an evaluation of a local special education program will be presented. The concept of meta evaluation (evaluating the evaluation) is discussed as one of the critical steps.

MAXIMIZING THE UTILIZATION OF EVALUATION RESULTS

Before progressing to a discussion of the form and stages of an evaluation of a local special education program it is necessary to identify factors which may affect the utilization of the evaluation results. Related discussion is found in the last section of this paper under **meta-evaluation** strategies.[2]

As noted throughout this paper it is difficult to think of a situation in which an evaluation is conducted without some purpose or use in mind. Several authors have defined use of evaluations as either instrumental or persuasive. Instrumental uses refer to immediate and observable uses of the results of the evaluation. The intervention strategies are changed or funding is modified. Persuasive uses are more difficult to discern. They relate to the decision maker's perception of the project being evaluated. Thus, while no immediate decisions can be observed, the evaluation serves to influence the perceptions of those interested in the program. Regardless of the kind of use intended by evaluators, it is possible to identify factors which appear to affect utilization.

Factors Which Affect Utilization[3]

According to Leviton and Hughes (1981), there are five categories of factors which may affect the utilization of evaluation results:

1. Relevance
2. Communication
3. Information Processing
4. Credibility
5. Commitment to Advocacy

The purpose of this section is to briefly discuss these factors presented by Leviton and Hughes as they may be related to the utilization of evaluations directed at special education programs. It should be noted that these categories are interdependent and responses may address one or more factors.

1. Relevance.

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[2] A partial list of references on utilization is set forth in Appendix B.

[3] A list of 'Strategies to Enhance Utilization' is found in Appendix C.

Many researchers studying utilization emphasize that the degree to which the evaluation accurately reflects the needs of potential users affects its use. To what extent are the needs of the clients embodied in the evaluation design? One program administrator was overheard saying that the design utilized was generic, one that could meet the needs of any program. As such, the anticipated results were so broad that they could not be used by staff to make decisions about improving the program.

Timelines of the evaluation reports also affect relevance. If the report does not reach the user when a decision is about to be made, then it is unreasonable to expect that the decision will be affected by the evaluation. It should be remembered though, that not all decisions occur at the conclusion of the study. A fermentation period may be required prior to utilization. The essential concern is that the report reach the user prior to the decision period.

The relevance issue can best be addressed by involving decision makers at the start of the evaluation. Emphasis should be on anchoring the evaluation to specific needs of the audience(s). Recognizing that there often are multiple audiences to the evaluation, the evaluation may have to focus on several different needs. Some may want to know about implementation fidelity, others about program accomplishments and still others about program costs. Each audience may have varied timelines and formats for reporting. Involving representatives of the various audiences in the design of the evaluation will ensure that it will be relevant to their needs.

2. Communication.

A related concept is the degree of communication between evaluators and clients. The utilization of evaluation results tends to increase when these persons engage in constant interchange about the evaluation. Such discourse should occur throughout the evaluation process from conceptualization and design through implementation and reporting. Information should come in several forms. Program administrators like to have results communicated verbally as well as in a formal report.

Reports should be tailored to specific audiences. Program staff often need very specific data while program administrators respond better to overall statements of program achievement. Legislators tend to react more positively to executive summaries allowing their staff to read the technical reports.

3. Information Processing.

There have been a number of special education articles in the past several years which claim that diagnostic data are not used in making educational decisions. No relationship can be found between the input data (test scores) and the output data (placement decisions).

The reason for this finding may be found in the information processing literature. People receive information from diagnosticians and interpret the information given their professional experience and knowledge. This processing leads to a decision that is now based on new information, the processed information.

The same may be true for evaluation. The users receive the report and must process the findings and recommendations in order to make judgments which lead to decisions. To facilitate processing, the evaluator needs to assist users in interpreting data. The user must be made aware of points of view which guided the evaluator's thinking.

Processing is enhanced when reports are specific to particular program elements, clearly presented and free of jargon. Information that is unexpected or unanticipated may have low utilization. Program administrators generally have some preconceived notions about how the evaluation will turn out based on their day to day association. If the findings are clearly different from expectations, then the user may be suspect. One way to counter this ocular trauma is to provide ongoing verbal feedback about the evaluation's findings. Reduce surprises!

Finally, like it or not, some administrators tend to like qualitative in addition to quantitative descriptions. Utilization research refers to the extensive use of vivid examples in addition to quantitative findings. A proper response to this usage phenomenon is to design studies which provide both qualitative and quantitative data.

4. Credibility.

Can the user trust the evaluation results? What standards do the decision makers have for evaluating the evaluation? What evidence will be convincing? It was noted previously that the user is likely to have expectations regarding the outcome of the evaluation. In this sense the user may evaluate the results in terms of the extent to which the results confirm or extend expectations.

Combining the results of several evaluations can increase credibility. A state education agency that receives a number of reports indicating program success is more likely to decide in favor of continuing program support. Credibility in evaluation is increased by aggregated reports.

Users who have a history of depending on evaluation findings appear more likely to continue using evaluation results. Success is a great motivator. Experiences in Virginia suggest that special education school staff who have positive experiences with evaluation want to continue. They report expanding their efforts to other aspects of their program as well as other areas of the system.

The technical quality of the evaluation as a factor influencing use is interesting. Most researchers have found that technical quality is not a primary concern among users. The most often cited support for technical quality occurs in situations where a potential user must be convinced of the accuracy of the evaluation results. For example, a special education director may require convincing evidence of a program's value prior to purchasing the product. Quality issues arise more often when summative judgments are being made as a result of evaluation. Finally, when people disagree with the findings of an evaluation, the attack typically centers on the quality of the methodology.

5. User Involvement in Advocacy.

To what extent are decision makers going to actively support the evaluation? How committed are decision makers to use? For example, in Virginia, a superintendent requested the evaluation of a particular program. After the evaluation got under way, the superintendent decided to retire. Interest in the evaluation dwindled.

Evaluation results get used when someone, particularly a program administrator, champions the evaluation. When the evaluation findings are consistently reported in both formal and informal communication, utilization is enhanced. The same is true when groups of individuals within or outside the organization support the evaluation.

Commitment is often related to the origin of the evaluation. If it is externally motivated, commitment is likely to be low. Take for example, Federal data reporting requirements. In one national study it was found that these data were used for state and local decision making.

The way to handle this advocacy factor is to make sure you know the user prior to the start of the evaluation. The

evaluation and dissemination of results should be tailored to the needs of these users. Their involvement in the design, implementation and reporting of the evaluation will increase their perceived ownership of the efforts. They will have a stake in the use of the evaluation. They will know its strengths and weaknesses. They will become informed advocates of the evaluation.

STEPS TO PLANNING THE LOCAL EVALUATION.

In this section keep practices which might be followed in planning the design, implementation and report of an evaluation of a local special education program are summarized. Planning for an evaluation can be summarized in eight steps as displayed in Figure 1 and briefly reviewed below. Worksheets to assist in planning local strategies to complete the steps are found in Appendix D and are referenced throughout the review. These steps are advisory in nature. They suggest that an evaluation is an orderly linear process. It's not. The user may employ some of the proposed strategies and not others. At the same time strategies may be modified. Contextual factors associated with the evaluation guide its evolution. Information needs, time constraints, local resources and audiences are examples of factors which may influence the evaluation effort.

The hope is that the reader's evaluation enterprise will follow the basic principles and practices discussed in previous sections. The assumption is that the user has identified a program which he or she needs to know something about. What appears on the following pages are some ideas on how to achieve this objective. It has been said that a drowning man will not pass up a patched life raft in hopes that an ocean liner will come by. What is presented here is a life raft. A complete 'Manual' on the evaluation of local special education programs in Virginia has been prepared by the author and is available from the Virginia Department of Education.

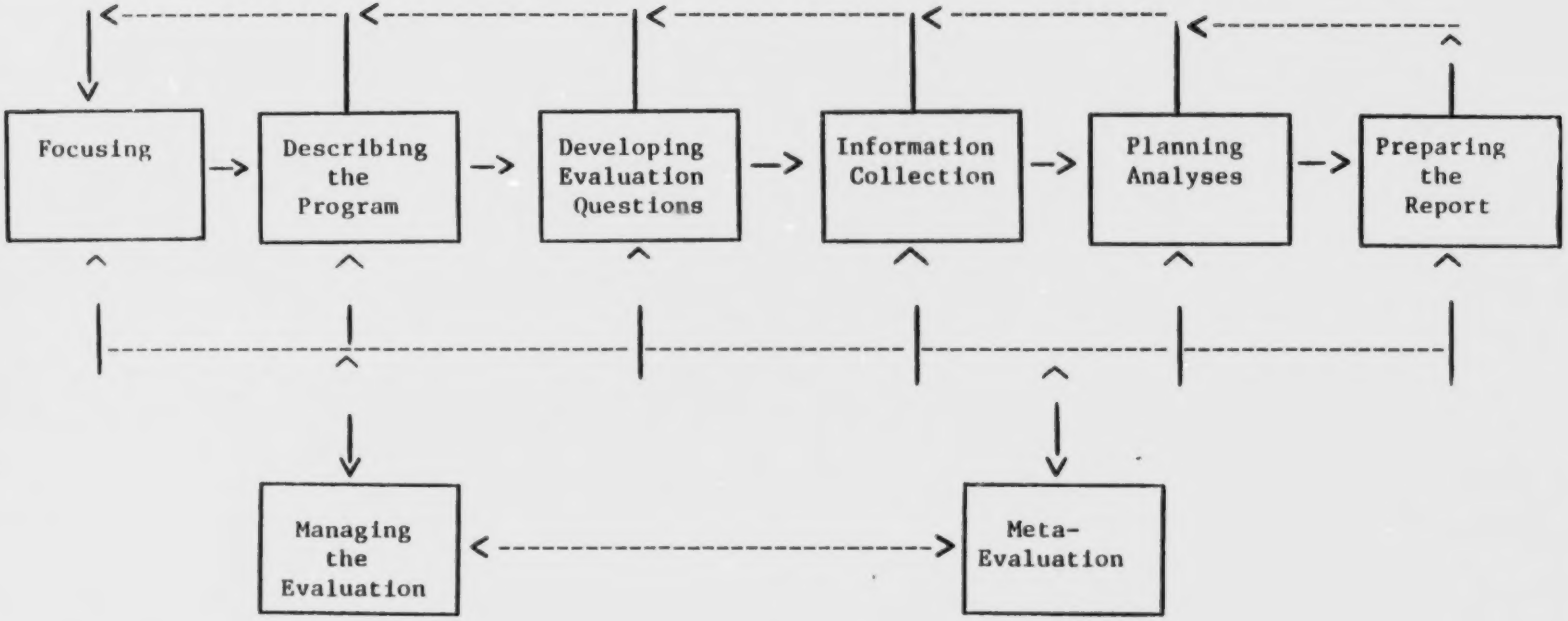
One final note. Experience suggests that as the program evaluation unfolds changes are made in the program. That is, the process of asking questions as well as gathering information about a program is likely to lead to program modifications. This is OK! It is why people should enter into an evaluation effort. The desired product of an evaluation is program change based on information. At any point in the evaluation information may be generated which suggests some aspect if the program needs to be fixed. If so, fix it; it's not always necessary to wait until the full evaluation is completed to revise the program.

1. Getting Started.

   The purpose of this stage is to get ready for the evaluation. The evaluation team must be selected. Who in the LEA will design, conduct and report the evaluation? Because of the complexities of the evaluation enterprise, the team should be composed of those persons familiar with the program as well as those trained in the practices and principles of evaluation. It is best if the team is

FIGURE 1

STEPS IN EVALUATION



sanctioned by the school administration (see Worksheet II).

The team must identify those persons who are interested in the program. These are the people who are or will be making judgments about the program. It is important to identify and specify the standards that will be used by these persons as they make judgments. Personal interviews, document reviews or surveys may be used.

Once the team is selected, the initial focusing of the evaluation takes place. The team decides if the total program or certain of its elements/components are to be evaluated. Input from a variety of sources both internal and external to the program should be used. Previous evaluation studies, compliance monitoring reports are excellent beginning points (see Worksheet IV).

The input from these multiple sources of information enables the team to establish the focus and purpose of the evaluation. The product of this 'getting started' phase of the evaluation is a list of the program component(s) which will be evaluated as well as a purpose statement which specifies who is interested in the evaluation of the component(s) and to what uses the evaluation information are directed (see Worksheet V).

It should be noted that the focus of the evaluation may shift as the evaluation progresses. This is appropriate. However, when the focus changes, the purpose as well as interest groups will have to be reassessed.

2. Describing the Program

In this stage the team describes in detail the program or its components to be evaluated. The product is called a Program Design and serves as a map or blue print of the program that is followed by the team as they develop an understanding of the program. Again the Effectiveness Indicators document is an excellent resource for identifying particular components of the local program.

The components of the program are described in terms of inputs (resources), processes (activities), and outcomes (products or benefits, changes in programs or clients). Interrelationships between components are described. Inputs for some components may be outputs from others and vice versa (see Worksheet VI).

Statements contained in the program description should be specific enough for anyone who reads them to understand

the program. The statements should include standards; expected, desired, or mandated program characteristics. These will serve the evaluation. The team will look to these statements which come from regulations, guidelines, professional literature or professional experience for comparisons for future judgments about the program.

After the design is completed, it should be reviewed by program staff and other interested parties for accuracy. It may be necessary to refocus the evaluation at this time. It also might be necessary to redefine the interest groups.

3. Writing Evaluation Questions.

Various types of evaluation questions might be addressed in evaluating a special education program. It should be remembered that evaluation is a comparative process; one which allows program performance to be compared to expectations regarding such performance. These expectations become the standards for the evaluation. The program description or design takes these standards into account and makes them explicit. Thus, the evaluation questions must be anchored in the program description if they are to yield useful information.

Evaluation questions link the program design to the evaluation design. They serve as the vehicle through which needed information is provided to the evaluation team. The evaluation questions focus the evaluation on specific elements of the program. They becoe the basis for the data collection strategies which are the core of the evaluation design. Thus, it can be seen that the evaluation questions are critical to the success of the evaluation. The central criterion for the success of an evaluation is its utility to decision makers. If the evaluation questions are inappropriately framed, then there is little probability that any useful information will result from the evaluation.

What kinds of questions can be asked in the evaluation of special education programs? Many people wait until the program is in operation or has been completed to conduct an evaluation. In the main, their focus is on outcome; "Are we achieving our objectives?". In our opinion it is unnecessary, if not foolish, to focus only on outcome evaluation questions. There are many types of evaluation questions which might be addressed in the evaluation depending on the information needs of decision makers. An excellent source for determining the types of evaluation questions which might be addressed in the

evaluation of a local special education program is the RRC Effectiveness Indicators document referred to earlier.

3.1 Design Evaluation Questions.

The first type of evaluation concern arises at the program design stage of program development. The purpose here is to judge the quality of the program prior to its implementation. This kind of information can save program staff from going down blind alleys and therefore, conserve their time and their client's time. There are four basic questions that can be asked at the design stage:

a) Is the program design accurate? Information needed here centers on the degree to which program staff, administrators, and others interested in the program agree with the description of the program's inputs, processes and outputs as well as the interrelationships which exist between program elements or components. The goal is consensus among administrators and others as to overall accuracy of the description.

b) Is the program technically sound? In this question the focus is on the theoretical basis for the program. Given what we know as best practice, either from experience or research, will this program work? When 'experts' view the program do they find it technically sound?

c) Is the program design complete and internally consistent? The intent of this question is two fold. The first to determine the extent to which the description of program components contains all necessary elements to enable the program to meet relevant standards. Does the program include references to state, federal and/or professional standards for providing services to exceptional learners.

The second focus of this question is on the logical consistency of the program. Essentially, it addresses the relationships between and among program functions. If the outcome of one component becomes the input to another, is the dependency accounted for in the program description? For example, is there a logical relationship between resource room and regular classroom experiences for learning disabled students?

d) Is the program politically sound? Here we are interested in fittedness. That is, to what degree

does the program description take into account the needs and expectations of boundary programs. The special education program exists within a broader context. It must be framed so that it can coexist with other programs. Relationships must be such that special education can benefit from the resources of other programs and at the same time be a benefit to those programs. This fourth design evaluation question seeks to gather information concerning any barriers to such co existence. For example, do special education training experiences mesh with regular programs?

If these design evaluation questions are addressed, then the program will have greater probability for success upon implementation. It should be noted, however, that these questions may also be asked of programs in the operational phase of their development. Answers to these questions can identify the causes for real or potential problems at any programming phase.

3.2 Implementation Evaluation Questions.

As the program is implemented, it is important to ascertain two things. First, the program staff must determine if all required resources or inputs are present. The program cannot be operated without these inputs. The required inputs are found in the program description. The following represent types of questions that might be asked:

- Do special education students have the skills required to enter the program?
- Are there the appropriate number of staff with required competence?
- Are required facilities available?
- Did the program staff acquire necessary instructional materials?
- Are there sufficient funds to operate the program?

Second, the program staff must determine the degree to which inputs are allocated according to the expectations (standards) established in the program plan or design. The form as well as the schedule of the program becomes the focus of this aspect of the evaluation effort. Are program activities being implemented according to the

program design, e.g., are students being mainstreamed in the manner described by staff?

3.3 Outcome Evaluation Questions.

Now the focus shifts to program results or effects, both interim or ongoing and final. There are seven basic questions which might be addressed in this phase of the evaluation:

a) Are we achieving goals as predicted? Here the evaluator is centering on interim or enroute objectives. The program is in its operational phase. This evaluation may occur at any time during the program. The program description will include anticipated performance outcomes with relevant timelines. These questions are particularly important if future performance depends on the acquisition of prior skills, knowledge, attitudes, behaviors or other changes in the program's targets. Implementation evaluation questions help interpret the findings related to these process evaluation questions. The focus here might be on short term IEP goals.

b) Did we achieve our goals? The difference between this question and the previous one is that the question is asked at program completion and addresses terminal objectives. In most education programs the terminal objectives are arbitrarily set. Thus, we might be focusing on annual goals as stated in the learner's IEP.

c) Did we cause the changes in the target? Here the emphasis is on proving a causal relationship between the program's intervention techniques and the outcomes. The evaluator's task is to rule out any rival or competing hypothesis or explanation. That is, the evaluator must answer the question, "Are there any reasonable explanations other than the program intervention strategies regarding the cause for changes in the program's targets?".

d) How is the program perceived? The focus here is on people's opinion of the program. Attitude assessment of program participants and others is conducted. The evaluator is interested in how people are reacting to the program. Do trainees perceive the program as being beneficial to their professional development? Do administrators believe the program is valuable? Do parents view the program as beneficial for their exceptional learner?

e) What did the program cost? This question seeks to describe the program costs. Typically, the focus is on start up costs, those one time costs that are necessary to establish the program, and operational costs, those that are recurring throughout the program such as staff salaries or consumable supplies.

f) Is the program cost effective? Answering this question is very difficult. A number of things must fall into place before the question can be answered. The program is compared to another program with identical objectives. If the program results in equal or better achievement of the objectives at a lower cost then it is said to be cost effective.

The problem with this approach is two fold. First, the evaluator has to find a comparison program with identical objectives. Second, it must be established that each program causes the projected benefits. An additional concern beyond cost, is the side effects of the programs being reviewed. A program may be less costly, but may give rise to negative staff or consumer reactions which would inhibit the implementation and effectiveness of the program in a new site.

g) Are trainees successful after leaving the program? These follow up evaluation questions focus on program graduates. Although they may focus on learners who leave the special education program to re enter regular education or leave school and enter into post school experiences such as the world of work or higher education, they may also look at the impact inservice education programs have on classroom instruction. For many decision makers, particularly those outside of the program, answers to these questions represent the 'proof of the pudding'.

As can be seen, there are a number of different questions which might be addressed in the evaluation of an educational program. The 'need to know' function of the evaluation dictates which questions are asked. That is, there are many people who may need to know something about the program. These people were identified in the previous section. It is important to involve these people in the identification and the formation of the evaluation questions. These questions focus the evaluation design. If people are omitted at this stage, then their information requirements may not be met (see Worksheet VII).

4. Planning Collection of Information.

The central focus here is matching the information/data collection to the information need expressed throughout the evaluation questions. Remember that the questions are linked to program elements. If the match occurs then the evaluation is more likely to yield usable results.

There are many different, complementary types of data collection strategies, both formal and informal. These include interviews, tests, surveys, observations and record reviews.

The team must plan to collect information that is convincing/believable to the evaluation audience. Concepts of representativeness, reliability, validity and objectivity must be considered when developing or selecting the data collection strategies. The team must plan to field test all data collection strategies prior to their actual use in the evaluation. Additionally, the team must plan to collect information in a timely fashion. That is, it must be gathered and presented within a timetable which will facilitate utilizing it for decision making, the purpose of evaluation (see Worksheet VIII).

5. Planning the Analysis of Evaluation Data.

The evaluation will result in the collection of a considerable amount of data from various sources. The purpose of data analysis procedures is to reduce raw data to a manageable form to allow for interpretations and/or inference with regard to the evaluation questions. A number of statistical techniques and data presentation methods are available to the team. These should be considered prior to actual data collection. Indeed, it is useful to field test the collection practices to determine if anticipated analysis techniques will be appropriate. Also, the technique and presentation strategies should be shared with audience representatives to determine their utility for judgment and decision making tasks.

An analysis plan should be developed by the team. The plan should be limited to each individual data collection process (instrument, interview, observation, etc.). It should identify potential interpretations and analyses to be made, person(s) responsible for the analyses, dates by which the analyses must be completed, and persons who must receive them (see Worksheet IX).

6. Planning the Evaluation Report(s).

Reporting is the final step in the evaluation process. When planning a report, the team has two objectives: to describe the methods and findings of the evaluation in relation to the questions posed in the evaluation; and, to recommend actions which might be taken to overcome any discrepancies identified in the evaluation.

Reporting closes the evaluation cycle. That is, it is the vehicle to get information to evaluation audiences. Therefore plans must be made to ensure that it is readable, comprehensible and timely. If not, the evaluation will fail its purpose to gather information to assist decision makers.

As noted earlier, the team may plan reports that are formal or informal and may plan to use varied formats including written, verbal and/or audio-visual presentations. Agreements regarding report characteristics should be made prior to the implementation of the evaluation. Additionally, the audience(s) for the report should be identified at the start. Any agreements associated with respondent identification or anonymity should be made prior to the study and maintained throughout, including the report (see worksheet X).

One final comment regarding the report. The evaluator's responsibility extends beyond the reporting 'process'. It is important for the evaluator to work with the receptors of the report to assist them in interpreting the processes and products of the evaluation in terms of the objectives of the evaluation as well as the ongoing and continuing program decisions and evaluation needs of the program administration staff and other parties interested in the program. Most programs with which are evaluated are like rivers which keep flowing. Our evaluation is but a ripple in its surface. The next look may involve a totally new context in which to work.

7. Managing the Evaluation.

As can be seen, the evaluation enterprise is complex. In order to maintain some sense of sanity and rise above the confusion, it is necessary to develop some type of management plan. There are two primary components to the management plan: a schedule of evaluation events and a budget. The plan will help organize the team's efforts. When this plan is completed, the team and others interested in the evaluation will be able to use it to assess logical consistency between and among tasks as well

as the reasonableness of timelines and costs before the evaluation begins. The plan will serve as a monitoring guide as the evaluation progresses.

The schedule of events is tied to the evaluation objectives or questions. For each there are sub-tasks or sub-questions. For each of the sub-tasks, the team identifies the person(s) responsible for the activity and its expected start and finish dates. This information can be used as the standard for the meta evaluation of the effort which is described at the end of this document. The schedule should include expected objectives and times for meta evaluation. (see Worksheet XI).

The budget for the evaluation contains the same elements as most programs. Generally there are five components (see Worksheet XII):

- Salaries & Benefits
- Travel & Subsistence
- Materials & Supplies
- Other expenses including:
  - telephone
  - postage
  - copying/printing
  - computer
  - honoraria for respondents/consultants
- Indirect Costs

8. Meta Evaluation.

The purpose of evaluation is to gather information upon which judgments can be made regarding the worth of an object (educational program, product, or process). When the evaluation process was discussed, it was indicated that it results in judgments which are comparative in nature. Standards or statements of expectation are compared to performance or what 'is'.

The same can be said of meta evaluation. In this case the judgment is a comparison made between the 'real' evaluation effort and expectations of what the evaluation should be.

There are standards for good evaluations just like there are standards for good programs. The Joint Committee on Standards for Educational Evaluation has developed standards for judging the merit of evaluation enterprises; utility, feasibility, accuracy and propriety.[4] These standards should be employed as guides in the development of the Evaluation Design. Other standards for special education programs come from federal and state regulations, professional standards, private accreditation services, best practices manuals and the professional literature. These standards should be considered when the Evaluation Design is constructed. The Evaluation Design becomes the standard for the meta evaluation.

Perhaps the most important standard for the meta evaluation comes from the decision maker, the audience for the evaluation. The standard here is usefulness. Does the evaluation produce the information which is required by the decision makers? The local evaluation team could develop a very elegant evaluation design but in the end the decision makers have to believe that the design will lead to answers to their evaluation questions. The evidence or information must be convincing to them. This is the primary standard to use in judging the worthiness of an evaluation enterprise.

We indicated earlier that the stages of evaluation follow the stages of program development, implementation and completion. The same is true for meta evaluation efforts. In fact, the basic steps in meta evaluation occur when the evaluation plan is written, before it is installed (design evaluation), when it is in operation (process evaluation) and when it is completed (outcome evaluation). The same types of questions can be asked in a meta evaluation as those addressed in section F-1. The reader should review these questions in light of the purpose of meta evaluation (see Worksheet XIII).

The initial meta-evaluation question often posed by the local evaluation team is "What are the driving and restraining forces to conducting the planned evaluation?" After completing the Management Plan the team will know precisely what is needed to conduct the evaluation. Now they must determine what factors or forces exist to support the evaluation and those which impede or restrain the successful implementation and use of the evaluation. It is important to

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[4] Joint Committee on Standards for Educational Evaluation. Standards for Evaluations of Educational Programs, Projects and Materials. New York: McGraw Hill 1981.

involve stakeholders in this Force Field Analysis (see Worksheet XIV).

The meta evaluation can be both informal and formal. Sometimes it is useful to informally discuss the evaluation plan or progress within the team or with representatives of target audiences. At other times it may be necessary to employ a third party evaluator, one who is neutral to both the program and the evaluation team. Formal and informal reporting mechanisms can be used. Just as programs are monitored as they are implemented, an evaluation can be monitored with reports coming at anticipated checkpoints.

For example, when a school system develops a special project to the point they believe it is good enough to share with others, they may call in an external evaluation team to audit the results of the school's evaluation efforts. This will facilitate dissemination activities. It may enhance the credibility of the claims made by the school regarding program effectiveness.

Evaluation planning requires many activities: focusing, describing, developing questions, data gathering strategies and analysis techniques. All of these should become the focus of meta evaluation activities. For example, are the evaluation questions clear enough to allow formation of data gathering strategies? Do decision makers agree that proposed strategies will meet their needs? Are the timelines for gathering data appropriate? Is the cost of the evaluation appropriate to the cost of the program?

A checklist developed by Blaine R. Worthen for conducting meta evaluation is set forth in Appendix A. The checklist could be used by program staff or audiences of the evaluation to determine its worth.

Appendix A

CHARACTERISTICS OF GOOD EVALUATION STUDIES[5]

Blaine R. Worthen
Northwest Regional Education Laboratory

YES NO

___ ___ 1. Conceptual Clarity--Refers to whether or not the evaluator exhibits a clear understanding of the particular evaluation being proposed.

___ ___ 2. Characterization of the Object of the Evaluation--No evaluation is complete unless it includes a thorough, detailed description of the program or phenomenon being evaluated.

___ ___ 3. Recognition and Representation of Legitimate Audiences--An evaluation is adequate only if it includes input from and reporting to all legitimate audiences for the evaluation. An evaluation of a school program which answers only the questions of the school staff and ignores questions of parents, children, and community groups is simply a bad evaluation.

___ ___ 4. Sensitivity to Political Problems in Evaluation--Many a good evaluation, unimpeachable in all technical details, has failed because of its political naivete.

___ ___ 5. Specification of Information Needs and Sources--Good evaluators tend to develop and follow blueprint which tells them precisely what information they need to collect and what the sources of that information are.

___ ___ 6. Comprehensiveness/Inclusiveness--The wider the range and the more important the variables included in the evaluation, the better it generally is.

___ ___ 7. Technical Adequacy--Good evaluations are dependent on construction or selection of adequate instruments, the development of adequate sampling plans, and the correct choice

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[5] Dr. Worthen is now at Utah State University, Department of Psychology.

and application of techniques for data reduction and analysis.

___ ___ 8. Consideration of Costs--Educators are often faulted for choosing the most expensive program from two that are equally effective, just because the expensive one is packaged more attractively or has been more widely advertised. The real fault lies with the evaluations of those programs which fail to consider cost factors along with the other variables.

___ ___ 9. Explicit Standards/Criteria--A statement of the criteria or standards which are used to determine whether the program was a success or a failure. The measurements and observations taken in an evaluation cannot be translated into judgments of worth without the application of standards or criteria.

___ ___ 10. Judgments and/or Recommendations--The only reason for insisting on explicit standards or criteria is that they are the stuff of which judgments and recommendations are made, and the latter are the sine qua non of evaluation.

___ ___ 11. Reports Tailored to Audiences--A typical evaluation might end up with one omnibus technical evaluation report which self-consciously includes all the details and one or more non-technical evaluation reports aimed at the important audience(s).

Appendix B

Utilization of Evaluation

Partial Reference List

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Appendix C

Strategies to Enhance Utilization

The following strategies have been found to affect the utilization of evaluation studies. Much of the information is adapted from a treatment of the topic by Peter Rossi and Howard Freeman in their text entitled "Evaluation: A Systematic Approach: Sage Publications, 1985. It should be remembered that evaluations serve many purposes and their use indices may either fall into the instrumental or conceptual domains. Instrumental use suggests that direct impact of the evaluation can be documented in some specific behavioral, organizational or system change. Conceptual uses center more on influencing the receptor's thinking about the entity that is being evaluated. According to Michael Patton, these uses are best described as 'reducing uncertainty' in the decision maker regarding a program. Finally, utilization is not time bound. The evaluation may affect the program before the evaluation is implemented, while it is being implemented, immediately after the evaluation, and/or sometime after its conduct. Thus, measurement of utilization will necessarily have to be continuous with utilization 'tracers' constantly available to monitor usage.

1.1 The evaluators should identify and involve decision makers at the start of the evaluation process.

While some have suggested that decision makers may not want to be involved in the evaluation, most would agree that utilization is enhanced by identifying the 'users' of evaluation at the start. They should be allowed to become involved in the:

a. identification of specific attributes of the program to be addressed in the evaluation;
b. generation of evaluation questions;
c. setting of standards for each question;
d. establishment of data gathering and analysis procedures; and,
e. selection of report time frames and formats appropriate to their needs.

1.2 Evaluation designs must be feasible.

The scope of the evaluation must match the program to be evaluated. The requirements (costs, staff and participant time) should not be unduly burdensome. The costs should be reasonable given the size and importance of the program. Disruptions in normal routine should be minimal. The concerns and values of those affected by

the evaluation should be assessed at the start and be reflected in the evaluation.

1.3 The evaluation should be conducted in a legally and ethically responsible way.

Propriety is the concern here. Protection of the rights of those participating in the evaluation is emphasized. Persons involved in the evaluation as well as those who are audiences for the evaluation have a right to know about the evaluation throughout its life cycle.

1.4 Evaluations should be technically sound.

The data gathering procedures should be reliable, valid and objective. They should logically flow from the evaluation questions addressed. Discussions, conclusions and recommendations must be logically related to results and evaluation questions.

1.5 Utilization and dissemination plans should be an integral part of the evaluation from the start.

Uses of the evaluation should be anticipated by program evaluators and decision makers from the beginning. Tracers which monitor and document both anticipated and unanticipated outcomes of the evaluation should become part of the evaluation design. Agreements concerning who receives evaluation reports, when and in what format should be made prior to implementing the evaluation. Those agreements should be adhered to throughout the evaluation. Reports must be available when data are needed for decision making and should be tailored to the expectations of the audience. Reports should be jargon free and include an executive summary.

1.6 The evaluation staff should be cognizant of contextual factors which might facilitate or impede information usage.

Often the usage of evaluation information is affected by factors outside of the control of the evaluators. The organization may not be ready for immediate change. Staff organization may not be ready for immediate change. Staff turnover may result in different priorities. Short falls in expected revenues may reduce opportunities for change. Public pressure may push for change even though it is not called for. Thus, decisions about the program may not follow the recommendations of the evaluations or may concur, but for different reasons.

1.7 The evaluation staff should view themselves as change agents.

Often the reason for reduced impact of the evaluation is that the evaluators do not assist program staff in understanding and interpreting the evaluation findings in terms of program decisions. This often occurs with terms of program decisions. This often occurs with evaluators who have 'hired gun' status. These evaluators are usually on to another program even before they finish the current evaluation. They do not stay around long enough to assist in the change process. Thus, it becomes the responsibility of program staff or the sponsor of the evaluation to articulate the findings of the evaluation with program improvement decisions.

1.8 The perceptions of the user will influence the degree to which evaluation results impact on programs.

The evaluation staff must have credibility. This may be established both through prior history and the design of a functional evaluation design. Continuous interaction with decision makers throughout the evaluation will increase credibility.

Credibility is enhanced by having an interdisciplinary team responsible for the evaluation. This team might include program professionals and evaluation specialists. Further, the team's efforts should be sanctioned by both program administrators and higher level administrators such as local school boards or finding agency representatives.

The decision maker's previous experience with evaluation may drive or restrain the use of the evaluation. The evaluator may have to reverse negative expectations/skepticism on the part of all or some users. At a minimum, the evaluator will have to identify perceptions of 'good evaluation' within the user group. If these perceptions vary to great extent from the evaluator, then this may be reason to discontinue the evaluation.

1.9 Multiple source/multiple methods broaden the acceptability of evaluations.

For each evaluation there are likely to be several audiences which represent people who will make judgments about the program. The evaluation design serves to generate data upon which these judgments will be made. When different data gathering strategies (e.g.,

interview, survey, and/or record review) and different sources (e.g., parents, teachers and administrators) are employed to answer the same evaluation question the information generated becomes more credible and may meet the needs of varied audiences, thus enhancing use of the evaluation.

1.10 The evaluation should be anchored to specific program elements.

So often we encounter program administrators and staff who say, "Now that we have the data, what should we do with them?" This generally occurs when the request for the evaluation is external to the program. Thus, someone outside the program funding agency representatives, legislators, or community members wants to know about the program. However, it happens with equal frequency when the evaluation questions are not linked to particular program components prior to the start of the evaluation. As indicated previously, the decisions to be served by the evaluation should be identified prior to the implementation of the evaluation by both evaluators and decision makers. These decisions should be anchored to specific elements of the program. Are decisions going to be made regarding program inputs (staff, clients, funds, equipment, other program resources), processes (strategic or activities) and/or outcomes (anticipated changes in clients, organization or systems)? To understand and utilize the evaluation in terms of these elements it will be necessary to explain each in enough detail to allow the explanation to become a standard for the evaluation.

1.11 Information retrieval and processing systems should be reviewed.

Several studies cite inadequate or inappropriate information systems within the user agency to facilitate use of evaluation results. This may be true for all levels of evaluation, but may be particularly important for system wide studies. For example, when a state special education department contemplates a state-wide study, it should assess its information processing capabilities. Will it be able to receive, process and disseminate information generated from the evaluation.

APPENDIX D

WORKSHEETS

APPENDIX D

PLANNING THE EVALUATION OF A LOCAL SPECIAL EDUCATION PROGRAM

-- WORKSHEETS --

The following worksheets are keyed to the stages involved in planning an evaluation that were presented in the preceding document. They have been prepared to assist the local team to conceptualize and plan their evaluation of the local special education program so that it will have the highest probability of meeting the information needs of judges/decision makers associated with the program. The worksheets take the team through the steps necessary to think through the evaluation. After completing all the worksheets the team should have:

- specified who will be needed to design, conduct, manage and report the evaluation;
- identified what it is about the program that will be addressed in the evaluation;
- identified salient evaluation questions keyed to the aspects of the program that will be evaluated;
- determined appropriate information gathering and analysis techniques;
- established necessary timelines for all phases of the evaluation (e.g., data gathering, analysis, reporting);
- developed a budget for the evaluation;
- planned a meta-evaluation to track the worthiness of the evaluation in terms of potential uses.

The product of this enterprise will be the Management Plan (Worksheet XI). All the information that is placed on the worksheets should feed into the Management Plan. This Plan becomes the map or guide for the evaluation. It is a public statement of the necessary steps to successfully complete the evaluation.

It is important to remember that the team progresses through evaluation planning each stage is interrelated with other stages and thus influences the design of each. Therefore, while there is a

logical linear relationship between the stages, that is, what is accomplished in stage one will dictate what is planned in stage two, any changes in thinking in a subsequent stage will impact on what was planned for previous stage. For example, if the team decides to add a qualitative component to the Information Collection Plan, then they will have to return to the Team Member Skill Worksheet to determine if that skill is present in the team. If not it may be necessary to hire additional staff. The team must remain flexible and open to changes as the evaluation plan evolves. Finally, the team should not feel constrained by the worksheets. If any one or more do not meet the needs of the team, don't use them! If the order appears illogical given the make-up of the team or its charge, change the order! For example, it may be more appropriate for the team to complete the Program Description activity first and then move to focusing.

WORKSHEET I

Summary

The worksheet presented on the following page serves to organize the local evaluation planning team's efforts. In this way it is a tally sheet which can be used to chart team progress in completing the evaluation planning tasks. Note that there is a column for not only listing the date the worksheet is completed but also the date it is revised, if appropriate. Space is available for comments regarding the efforts described in the worksheet. This area can be used for notes to key team members into future decisions in the planning phase.

WORKSHEET I

Planning Progress Record

Worksheet Name	Date Completed	Date Revised	Notes
II Team Member Skill			
III Stakeholder Involvement			
IV Focussing Matrix			
V Evaluation Purposes			
VI Program Description			
VII Evaluation Questions			
VIII Information Collection Plan			
IX Data Analysis Plan			
X Report Generation Plan			
XI Evaluation Management Plan			
XII Evaluation Budget			
XIII Meta-Evaluation Plan			
XIV Force Field Analysis			
XV Utilization Tracking Form			

WORKSHEET II

Team Member Skill Checklist

Evaluation is a complex process requiring many varied skills and different knowledge bases. Some team members will have to know the program and the context in which it is implemented while others will have to be knowledgeable and skillful in the principles and practices of evaluation. It is unreasonable to expect that one team member will have all the knowledge and skill necessary to design, conduct, and report the evaluation. It may be necessary to obtain the services of consultants outside of the program to assist the team in certain aspects of the evaluation (e.g, data collection and analysis). If this is the case, the team members must be able to clarify their needs for the consultant to be certain there is a match between their expectations and the approach to be used by the consultant.

The following worksheet should be completed after the team is appointed. List each team member's name at the top of the columns on the form and then check the skill(s) that team member can contribute to the effort. It may be necessary to add team members when the form has been completed if required skills are not present. Additionally, it is likely that as the evaluation planning progresses, additional knowledge/skill will have to be represented in the team. Use addition sheets if there are more than five team members.

WORKSHEET II

Team Member Skill Checklist

TEAM MEMBER NAME(S)					
Knowledge/Skill Base					
Program					
Content					
Policies/Procedures					
Administration					
Context					
Classroom (s)					
School Building (s)					
School District					
State Education Agency					
Community					
Evaluation					
Group Process Techniques					
Interpersonal Communication					
Program Design/Description					
Sampling					
Instrument Design/Selection					
Survey					
Interviews					
Document Review					
Observation Schedules					
Tests					
Conducting Interviews					

Team Member Skill Checklist

TEAM MEMBER NAME(S)					
Knowledge/Skill Base					
Analysis/Interpretation					
Data Storage					
Descriptive					
Correlational					
Qualitative					
Program Management					
Budgeting					
Reporting					
Writing					
Formating					
Editing/Language					
Marketing					
Other (Please Specify)					
_____					
_____					
_____					
_____					

WORKSHEET III

Stakeholder Involvement

At the start of the evaluation the team must identify persons who are interested in or knowledgeable of the program. These people are called "stakeholders". Stakeholders are those who:

- Care about the program
- Plan the program
- Provide the program
- Benefit from the program
- Will provide data for the evaluation
- Will benefit or suffer from the evaluation
- Will use the results.

These individuals will interact with the team throughout the evaluation. They may provide information about the program; why it was established, the program objectives, activities used to achieve objectives, and standards which might be used to judge program merit. This information will be useful in the Program Description stage of the evaluation.

Stakeholders may also assist the team in deciding what aspects of the program should be evaluated. They may inform the team of the probable decisions which will be made about the program. Thus, the stakeholders may assist the team in focusing the evaluation.

Another function often played by stakeholders is to help the team formulate evaluation questions and appropriate information gathering and reporting procedures. Thus, they can have significant input into the design of the evaluation.

Finally, stakeholders may be used to evaluate the worthiness of the evaluation. They may provide input to the team on the appropriateness of the Evaluation Plan as well as the usefulness of the information generated through the implementation of the evaluation.

Several potential Stakeholder groups are represented on Worksheet III. It is useful for the team to not only identify the group which might be interested in the program or its evaluation, but also to note the stage of the evaluation in which the stakeholder group might participate. Some may participate in all stages. In fact, as stressed in the previous document, it is important to engage the stakeholders, where appropriate and feasible, not only in the design of the evaluation but also throughout its implementation and reporting. Such continuous involvement will promote the use of the evaluation results.

Worksheet III

STAKEHOLDER INVOLVEMENT PLAN
Evaluation Function

STAKEHOLDER (S)	FOCUSING	PROGRAM DESCRIPTION	WRITING QUESTIONS	CHOOSING METHODS	PLANNING ANALYSIS	PLANNING REPORTING	BUDGETING MANAGING	META EVAL.
Special Education Administrator								
Special Education Program Staff								
Special Education Advisory Committee								
Principals								
Superintendents								
School Board Members								
State Department of Education Staff								
Parents								
Non-Parent Community Members								
Related Education Staff								
Regular Education Staff								
Advocacy Groups								
Legislative Staff & Delegates								
Other _____ _____ _____ _____								

WORKSHEET IV

Focusing Matrix

Early in the evaluation it is important to identify the program components that are **probably** going to be the focus of the evaluation. This is a preliminary effort which likely will be modified after the Program Description stage of the process. The purpose of this activity is to orient the team to the needs of the evaluation, to give them some direction.

After the team is formulated they will begin interactions with stakeholders and reviewing documents which address the program to be evaluated. These documents may include formal charges that have been given to the team regarding the purpose of the evaluation as well as regulations which might indicate required targets of the evaluation and/or required evaluation strategies, timelines, and reports. The Effectiveness Indicators for Special Education can be helpful at this stage. The six major chapters can be used as starting point. The chapters deal with the following possible evaluation foci:

2. Philosophy, Policies and Procedures
3. Resource Allocation Practices
4. Staffing and Leadership
5. Parent Participation and Community Involvement
6. Instructional Practices
7. Program and Student Outcomes

The team should review each program component (e.g., see page 49) and then rate the degree to which the evaluation of that component is needed. If the evaluation is required by regulation, school policy or if decisions will be made immediately, then the evaluation would be essential. If the evaluation is not required, but decisions will be made in the near future about the component then the evaluation would be judged as being necessary. If no judgments or decisions will be made about the component, then there is a limited need for its evaluation. Specific program components that might be considered are:

- Child find identification
- Pre-referral interventions and referrals
- Diagnosis and re-evaluation
- Planning and placement
- Delivery of Special Education Services
- Delivery of Related Services
- Program Administration

WORKSHEET IV

Focusing Matrix

Relative Need for Evaluation

Program Component Name	Essential	Necessary	Limited	Comments
1.				
2.				
3.				
4.				
5.				
6.				
7.				

WORKSHEET V

Evaluation Purposes

The outcome of the completion of the Focusing Matrix in Worksheet IV is a preliminary understanding of which components of the program will be addressed by the evaluation team. The next step is to clarify the purpose(s) for evaluating the program component. Why will the component be evaluated? What use(s) will be made of the evaluation data? What decisions will be served?

To ensure that your purpose statements communicate clearly, make sure they have four parts:

1. An objective, e.g.:
   - To describe
   - To determine the extent to which
   - To determine which is more effective

2. Specific program components being targeted, e.g.:
   - Program design
   - Use of resources or inputs
   - Actual activities, practices or processes used and/or
   - Actual results, outcome outputs, or inputs

3. One or more intended uses, e.g.
   - Program improvement
   - Policy development
   - Accountability
   - Public relations or persuasion, and/or
   - Planning additional evaluations

4. One or more specific users, e.g.
   - SEA staff, administrators, or policy makers
   - LEA staff, administration or policy makers
   - Parents
   - Employers
   - Public, and/or
   - Others

For each selected program component, one or more of the following reasons for evaluating that component might be noted:

- "Soft" data indicating success that should be documented
- New research suggesting alternatives
- Complaints from Consumers
- Desire to expand or replicate
- Desire to maintain/survive
- Impending budget cuts
- Staff concerns about doing better
- "Soft" data indicating potential problems
- Need for a better image
- Mandates and requirements
- Specific requests for information
- Administrator concerns about:
  - Program design (the overall plan/structure of inputs, processes and outputs)
  - Resources (facilities, equipment, personnel, material and other inputs)
  - Activities (actual procedures used; the processes)
  - Results (outputs and impact)

For each component selected for evaluation after reviewing the Focusing Matrix data, the team should write a purpose statement which indicates why it is important to evaluate the component; for what potential uses. Then the team may want to review all purpose statements and rank order them in order of importance to the total evaluation effort.

WORKSHEET V

Evaluation Purposes

Program Component Name	Purpose Statement	Priority Rank

WORKSHEET VI

Program Description

One of the most common complaints heard from local program administrators relates to how to use evaluation information to make decisions. One reason for this problem is that not enough time was spent in the evaluation planning for describing the program to be evaluated. The program description serves two purposes. First, it enables the team to acquire a firm understanding of the program. Second, it allows the team to anchor the evaluation to specific program components.

The team's task at this stage of the evaluation process is to first identify the major facets of the program to be evaluated. This is made less difficult if the team determines the major functions of the program and then aggregates similar functions into program components. For example, most local special education programs have the following major functions:

- Child Find/Identification
- Pre-referral intervention and Referral
- Diagnosis and Re-evaluation
- Planning and Placement
- Delivery of Special Educational Services
- Delivery of Related Services
- Program Administration

After each major function area or component is identified, it should be described in terms of its Outputs, Processes and Inputs (I-P-O's). What are the major goals or objectives for the components? What activities or strategies are used to accomplish these objectives? What resources (staff, time finances, information, equipment, facilities, etc.) are required to implement the strategies?

Before moving ahead, two observations about Program Description should be made. First, program components are often related. That is, outputs from one are used as inputs for another. For example, the output from the diagnostic function becomes a resource (input) for the planning and placement function. Thus, it is possible to Network components to indicate relationships. When the success of one component depends on the success of another, this relationship should be addressed in the evaluation.

Second, the component description may be completed by level. The team may first describe I-P-O's each component at a general level. Then, if the component is to be the focus of the evaluation the team would describe it in more detail, being more specific for each IPO statement. This increased

detail enables the team to establish program standards. That is, these statements serve as the standards upon which the program will be evaluated. They represent reasonable expectations of the program in terms of its inputs, processes and outcomes. A useful resource to the team in the Program Description stage of the evaluation process is the 'Effectiveness Indicators for Special Education: A Reference Tool' developed by the National RRC Panel on Indicators of Effectiveness in Special Education and available through the Council of Administrators of Special Education, Indiana University, Bloomington, Indiana.

WORKSHEET VI

Program Description

LEVEL 1 2 3 4

COMPONENT:		
INPUT	PROCESS	OUTPUT

WORKSHEET VII

Evaluation Questions

The evaluation questions serve as a bridge between the Program Description and the Information Collection Plan. The questions set the stage for information collection by not only indicating the focus of the evaluation on a particular program component but also the types of information needed to answer the question.

As noted in the preceding document there are a number of different kinds of evaluation questions which might be addressed. These are listed below:

- Design
- Implementation
  - input resource availability
  - installation fidelity
- Outcome
  - process
  - end-point
  - follow-up
  - participant reaction
- Cost
  - descriptive
  - comparative.

One or more of these questions may be directed at any program component to be evaluated. The question depends on the judgments that will be made about the program. Therefore the team must decide the use that the evaluation will serve.

As noted earlier, one problem faced by program staff and evaluators is not knowing how to apply evaluation findings to decisions about the program. This occurs because the evaluation question was not anchored to a particular program components or function. Thus, it is important to identify the program component to which the evaluation question relates at this stage of planning. In column two of Worksheet VII there is space for the planners to indicate the 'design referent' for the evaluation question. This refers to the work completed in relation to Worksheet VI, Program Description. The number of the component associated with the evaluation question should be entered here. A review of the priority purpose(s) (Worksheet V) will help narrow the questions and relate them to specific uses.

Finally, we believe that evaluation is a comparative process. That is, information generated in response to the evaluation question is compared to some standard or expectation. These standards should be found in the Program Description because it is supposed to reflect best and/or required practice. The final piece of information that the team must provide is a statement of what evidence is needed to answer the evaluation question.

WORKSHEET VII

Evaluation Questions

Evaluation Question	Design Referent	Standard/Evidence

WORKSHEET VIII

Information Collection Plan

After the evaluation questions have been posed by the team, members must devise an information collection strategy for each question. Before describing the components of the plan it should be emphasized that: 1) one strategy may respond to more than one question; and 2) it is best practice to gather information from multiple sources/strategies for each question.

There are a number of data collection strategies which may be employed by program evaluators. The more common strategies by sources of information are presented in Table 1.

A typical Information Collection Plan is set forth in Worksheet VIII. While most of the entries are self explanatory two should be explained. First, note that the evaluation team may not want to use all members from a particular source. Therefore, a sampling plan is needed. For example, if it was not feasible to survey all parents then a random sample should be drawn. Most introductory research texts discuss sampling strategies.

Second, if the data collection strategy is not available, the team will have to establish a development schedule. This will include the required field testing to obtain indices of the reliability, validity and objectivity of the strategy. Again, an introductory research text should be consulted by the team.

Table 1

DATA COLLECTION STRATEGIES
By Information Sources

RECORDS REVIEW	TESTS	SURVEY	INTERVIEW	OBSERVATION
Documents	Standardized Achievement Tests	Policy Decision Makers	Staff	Classroom
Legislation			Students	Playground
Policies	Criterion-Referenced Tests	Staff	Parents	Halls
Student Records		Students	Content Bases	Lunchrooms
Existing State & Federal Data Bases		Parents	Community Agency Representatives	Community
Personnel Logs		Employers	Program Participants	Home
Correspondence Files		Content Bases	State Department of Education Staff	
Work Samples		Community Agency Representatives		
		Program Participants		
		State Department of Education Staff		

WORKSHEET VIII

INFORMATION COLLECTION PLAN

Collection Strategy	Evaluation Question	Source	Sample	Development Schedule	Administration Schedule

WORKSHEET IX

Data Analysis Plan

Each collection strategy will generate data that must be cleaned (made ready for analysis), input, analyzed and reported. It is good practice to use the field test of the collection strategy to generate data to practice this process. Sample data tables will emerge which can be reviewed by team members and stakeholders to determine their appropriateness in response to questions as well as precipitate additional data requirements.

For each data set a particular data analysis procedure will be applied. This procedure will depend on a number of things. First, the type of evaluation question must identified. Is it descriptive, comparative or correlational? Second, what is the level of data - nominal, ordinal, interval or ratio? For comparative questions the number of groups compared is important to the analysis decision as is the number of variables in a correlational question.

A typical Data Analysis Plan is found in Worksheet IX. The entries relate to the decisions described above. As in the Information Collection Plan, it maybe necessary to consult a research text or obtain outside assistance to complete this stage of evaluation planning.

WORKSHEET IX

DATA ANALYSIS PLAN

Collection Strategy	Data Analysis	Data Analyst	Report Name	Report Availability	
				Draft	Final

WORKSHEET X

Report Generation Plan

A vital step in the planning process is describing the vehicles for reporting the evaluation. The team must consider audiences for the report, their timelines, the format of the report as well as who is responsible for generating the report. It should be remembered that both formal and informal reports will be provided throughout most evaluations. All these decisions should be made prior to the start of the evaluation. Finally, all participants in the evaluation should be made aware of the planned uses of the data prior to implementing collection strategies.

WORKSHEET X

REPORT GENERATION PLAN

Report Name	Evaluation Question	Report Format	Audiences	Person(s) Responsible	Report Deadlines	Comments

WORKSHEET XI

Evaluation Budget

Evaluation takes money! The evaluation team must be reimbursed for their time and travel. If consultants are used they too must be remunerated. Supplies and materials will have to be secured as will other resources including phone, postage, copying and computer time. Respondents may have to be paid. All these costs should be considered as the plan emerges. In the final analysis some activities may have to be revised if costs are excessive.

The worksheet on the following page enables the team to project costs according to evaluation activity. It should be completed after the Management Plan.

WORKSHEET XI

EVALUATION MANAGEMENT PLAN

Evaluation Question	Sub-Tasks	Persons Responsible	Expected		Monitoring Comments
			Start	Completion	

WORKSHEET XII

Evaluation Budget

Evaluation takes resources! The evaluation team must be reimbursed for their time and travel. Even if internal staff are used, their work loads must be shifted. If consultants are used they too must be remunerated. Supplies and materials will have to be secured as will other resources including phone, postage, copying and computer time. Respondents may have to be paid. All these costs should be considered as the plan emerges. In the final analysis some activities may have to be revised if costs are excessive.

The worksheet on the following page enables the team to project costs according to evaluation activity. It should be completed after the Management Plan.

Worksheet XII

EVALUATION BUDGET

Evaluation Activity

CATEGORY	FOCUSING	PROGRAM DESCRIPTION	WRITING QUESTIONS	CHOOSING METHODS	PLANNING ANALYSIS	PLANNING REPORTING	BUDGETING MANAGING	META EVAL.	TOTAL
1.0 Staff Salaries									
2.0 Benefits									
3.0 Staff Travel & Substance									
4.0 Materials & Supplies									
5.0 Other expenses:									
5.1 Communication (Telephone/ postage)									
5.2 Copying									
5.3 Printing									
5.4 Consultant - honoraria - travel									
5.5 Computer									
5.6 Respondent Pay									
6.0 Total Direct									
7.0 Total Indirect									
8.0 TOTAL COST									

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WORKSHEETS XIII, XIV and XV

Meta Evaluation Plan

The goal of the evaluation process is to provide information for decision makers. It will be necessary for the team to develop a plan for determining the degree to which this goal is achieved. As noted in the previous document this is called meta-evaluation. The same types of questions may be addressed in the meta-evaluation as in the evaluation of the program. For example, the evaluation could be evaluated prior to its implementation (design evaluation), as it is being implemented and according to its outcomes and costs.

A sample Meta-Evaluation Plan is set forth as Worksheet XIII. If a meta-evaluation is to be conducted then a budget should be established using Worksheet XII. After the Evaluation Management Plan is constructed it may be useful for the team to conduct a Force Field Analysis of the proposed evaluation effort. That is, the team would identify all those forces which drive or support the conduct of the evaluation as planned. Second, what are the forces which will restrain impede or serve as a barrier to the successful conduct of the study? It is useful to include key stakeholders in the Force Field Analysis. The focus could be on individual evaluation questions or on the complete evaluation. Worksheet XIV could be used to complete the Analysis.

As noted in the utilization chapter of this guideline it is important to not only anticipate potential uses of evaluation findings during the planning phase but also to establish mechanisms for tracing these uses. Additionally, the team should expect that intended and unintended effects of the evaluation will emerge as the tracking and evaluation unfolds. Worksheet XV is presented as a way this might be accomplished.

WORKSHEET XIII

META-EVALUATION PLAN

Meta-Evaluation Questions	Evaluation Design Referent	Data Collection Strategy	Person Responsible	Report Information

WORKSHEET XIV

Force Field Analysis

Evaluation Question: _____

Forces For being able to answer question	Forces Against being able to answer the question

WORKSHEET XV

Utilization Tracking Form

Evaluation Question	Purpose	Documentation